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THOUGHTS.

ON

TRAITS

OF THE

MINISTERIAL POLICY.

BY A VERY QUIET LOOKER-ON.

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** * * Rarely has passed a period when a just and accurate apprehension of public men and public measures was of such momentous importance. With the earnest desire that truth, in its beautiful essence, may be inculcated as widely as possible, I have brought into a condensed view some of the principal features of the early and existing operation of the policy and measures devised and adopted by the Ministers now in power. I would have men look straightly at the aspects of the time, in the spirit of manly sincerity, and of beings accountable for the use or abuse of the means which the laws of this empire place in their hands, for guarding their own interests, and the interest of all their race.*

The actions of statesmen, taken in relation to the circumstances wherein they have been performed, go mainly to guide us to those in whom our confidence may be reposed. The present publication is, in every statement of fact, drawn from public and well-known papers and documents, so that any thing like "colouring" would be not less absurd than disingenuous. I have simply compiled and arranged a mass of facts, hitherto scattered over huge bulks of print and paper, not clearly known and comprehended by even intelligent persons who have not devoted time to elaborate political inquiries.

The arguments and deductions I have founded on these facts are those which strike me as flowing from a fair representation of the actual condition of public affairs. Let us first weigh well the truth, and then proceed to our mental decision on the merits of public servants—as to how the Cabinet has carried itself, in a position as critical as it was peculiar. How much of England's woe or welfare is at issue on the quality of our opinion in this matter!

THOUGHTS

ON

TRAITS

OF THE

MINISTERIAL POLICY.

EARLY PROSPECTS AND EARLY PROPHECIES.

IN THE autumn of 1841 Sir Robert Peel entered office, at a period of distress and distraction which, on the representation of the men who for several years had held the administration of public business, stood altogether unexampled in the annals of this empire. The Budget statement of Mr. Baring, the Whig Finance Minister, presented a gloomy prospect ;—the condition of large multitudes of the people was more gloomy still. The external markets of the world had been closing against the productions of British industry, and the home demand was scarcely more promising.—Misery, fearful and widely extended, pervaded the great seats of manufacturing enterprise ; deep despondency had been the general impression at home—while our relations with foreign states stood on the most critical and precarious footing.

Lord John Russell and the Lord Viscount Palmerston taunted their successors with ignorance of the amazing and inextricable complication of difficulties wherewith the latter would have to contend—discontent, destitution and agitation—failing commerce—wars, real and menaced. The leading members of the new Government replied that they *did* comprehend the nature and extent of these difficulties—that the people had placed them in power that they might undertake the all-but hopeless enterprise of applying some remedy to the manifold mischiefs which had sprung into existence under the Ministry of men who had taken office with the catching watchwords of “Economy, Retrenchment and Reform.” The new Government said this, and further declared that however great the difficulty—however arduous the labour—however critical the emergencies of the time—they would shrink not from accepting the offering of their country’s trust, no matter how personally disadvantageous were the circumstances under which it must be accepted—at no matter what degree of imminent peril to the mere vanity of reputation for political success.

Not without a semblance of rational probability were the dark forebodings of the displaced Ministers. Than these gentlemen none could be more cognisant of the misfortunes which (to use no sterner language) they themselves had unhappily failed to avert. Year after

year had passed, and year after year the financial deficiency—the unfavourable disproportion between the revenue and expenditure—had become more startling; the total deficit, for a period of ten years, amounting to the enormous sum of Ten Millions sterling. Without for the moment referring to the wisdom of a policy which flung away large sources of revenue with one hand, while it went on swelling expenses with the other, it is well to bear in mind that the “expedients” resorted to by Mr. Baring, such as increasing the dead weight of Assessed Taxes, and of other imposts that press directly upon the material comforts of the middle and humbler classes, had most miserably failed. So far from equalising the out-goings and in-comings, they did not even mitigate the *proportion* of the discrepancy. We had wars impending, and wars in actual course of prosecution. There was the expedition of horrors north-west of India,—there was the questionable contest with the Emperor of China. France, the most prominent power of the European continent, had been literally arming against us. In America the long-rankling dispute on the Boundary had festered into a threatened rupture. Give all praise for “dexterity” to Lord Palmerston’s conduct of our diplomatic correspondence with these two great powers—award to his Lordship the most ample eulogy that may be earned by verbal “cleverness”—by smartness of repartee and much exercitation in routine ceremonial—admit all this, and there still remains the mournful truth that however smart and salient might have been his Lordship’s manner of transacting business, its effective *result* was peculiarly and almost invariably unfortunate. The lapse of two years had brought France to the verge of a declaration of war—had inspired millions of Frenchmen with an unbounded hatred of England—had brought about the arming of a million of men in France, and the withdrawal of the money expended on that armament, from the means of the French community to purchase articles of British manufacture.

Marshal Soult visited England in 1837. We were at that time regarded by France (I may almost say, by the populace of France) with a friendliness as enthusiastic as her hostility in 1840 was blatant and bitter. But successive displays of crotchetty ingenuity—palpable discourtesies in matters of etiquette—engines of this minute but efficacious character were “skilfully” employed by a British statesman, to overthrow the alliance which it had been his favourite boast that he had himself established and secured. Slightings of this kind are more galling to the feelings of our mercurial neighbours than would be positive and substantial injuries. So he seemed to think, who essayed the part of the experimental philosopher to test the patience of those with whom he had to deal. His famous “complications” on the Treaty of July will ever stand conspicuous amongst analogous strokes of “statesmanship.”

There is no exaggeration here—no indulgence in vague generalism. Facts plain and palpable are pointed to—facts which, in the opinion of some, have been the mainstay of the national jealousy—of the extreme exclusive commercial policy that got into such vogue in France—a policy practically directed against England, and which, while ultimately injurious to those who adopt it, could not fail to

involve, in its immediate consequences, a painful addition to the calamitous experiences of our own trading and manufacturing people.

And how stood matters with America? I have really no patience to go through the innumerable points which, "somehow or other," had been conjured into so many *casus querelæ*. When the Whigs came into office, there was *one* main subject of dispute with the United States—that relating to the North-Eastern Boundary. When they went out, this one dispute remained, and in accumulated complexness; for Lord Palmerston, in the interim, *had allowed American forts to be erected on the very "Disputed Territory" whereof the world has heard so much, and his Lordship had thus virtually surrendered to America the sovereignty of that very Territory for asserting the United States' claims to which, Sir Howard Douglas, the gallant British Governor of New Brunswick, had, a few years previously, fined and confined a citizen of the Republic.*

There remained, then, this Boundary question, with its new circle of intricacies called into being by our theoretical firmness and practical submissions. But in the interval of Lord Palmerston's administration of Foreign Affairs, a host of fresh difficulties had sprung up. There was the Caroline "affair"—the Creole "affair"—there was the Right of Visit question,———But an allusion is enough to call recollection to the really dangerous position of our relations with America, as left by the late Ministers.—In America, as in France, a hostile sentiment had been excited against us. In America the call for British manufactures had diminished in an alarming degree, and there was the darkening prospect of a mutually injurious war, which would altogether close that great foreign outlet against the industrial produce of our people.

It is scarcely necessary to mention the disastrous effects, upon British trade, which had their origin in our interference (I will not say a foully unjust, but certainly a not indispensable proceeding) with the Peninsular troubles of 1832—'40. The Chinese markets, too, such as they were, were at least nominally shut against us, and from the fashion of operations that had been pursued, it was altogether a puzzle to guess when they were likely to open.

'Twere a tedious and thankless labour to recapitulate the multitudinous catalogue of our calamities. They are fresh in men's memory, and to this day we are suffering—we are far from having wholly shaken off their effects.

Most grievous of all, in the heart of our land there were millions of men suffering harrowing distress. There was an extensive and obstinate dearth of employment. The manufacturing population was miserable, and though food was dear, the position of agriculturists was any thing but satisfactory.

An impression had been circulated, and very generally created, that there was something requiring revision in the state of the laws affecting Import Duties. The Whigs, who, in their days of power, and up to the eve of their retirement, had been unable to discern the propriety of extensive change in this part of our system, seemed suddenly, when power had left them, gifted with the much-bruited faculty of *clairvoyance*. They propounded their plan. My space is

limited, but I have a word to say respecting the main feature of that plan—the part that related to the Corn Laws.

Food was dear in the year 1841—food was dear, and myriads of men were without bread—without work. A cry was raised that the Corn Law had a large share in inducing the want of employment—in aggravating the miseries consequent on that want of employment—and it was boldly asserted that a change in the law would impel foreigners to modify the restrictions of their Tariffs, and deal for English goods to such an extent as should give brisk business to the producers of these goods. The operation of the Corn Law was grossly misstated. The effect was, however, obtained, that large classes of men called loudly for an alteration of the law, and Lord John Russell came forward to propose one. He proposed not to abrogate restrictive duties, nor yet to establish a system that should apportion the supply of foreign corn to the wants of the British consumer.—I am no special admirer of “theoretical” politics—I take practice to be, in nine cases out of ten, the most safe and faithful exponent of theory;—but as the Noble Lord is rather prominent as a theorist, it is only fair to examine the theory of his Corn Law scheme. He proposed a duty of eight shillings the quarter on the import of foreign wheat—the duty, according to *his own* scheme, to accompany every range of price.

By the then existing scale of rates the duty virtually ceased when wheat in England reached the point of 73s. a quarter—the free importation of foreign wheat (at a nominal duty for statistical purposes) being then permitted, in order to relieve the consumer, and keep prices down to a reasonable level. On the other hand, as prices went down the duty rose—the scale being adjusted with the purpose, when corn was scarce, of providing for the admittance of an adequate supply, and, when cheap, of giving to the British farmer and labourer a preference of encouragement and support—a preference, over the foreigner, to the custom of their own countrymen.

For instance, if wheat were as high as 73s., and the quarter loaf at 9d. or more, it is pretty evident that a fair balance of interests between producer and consumer required that the rise should be checked by importation. If, on the other hand, in a year of superabundant agricultural fruitfulness, the price sunk to 40s. the quarter, or 5d. to 5½d. the quarter loaf, it may be predicated with equal clearness that an import of foreign wheat would be useless in every point of view, and most mischievous and ruinous in many respects.

A briefly stated recapitulation of facts will illustrate this—

Suppose a season of abundant farming production, like that of 1835, when prices in England touched the extreme depression of less than 40s. a quarter. In such a season, take the price at home at about 40s. Now, averaging the difference of prices as between the wheat-growing districts near the Black and Mediterranean seas, and those of the Baltic and of America—the price during such years would range, at the places in question, from 20s. to 25s. Add to this the eight-shilling duty proposed by Lord John Russell, and to this put the average freightage charges from the various foreign ports to Eng-

land. The result would be that foreign wheat, when the price in England was 40s., might be sent into our markets at a fraction below that price, or at a mean rate of about 39s.

Now here the foreigner would compete with the English producer at such a rate of differential reduction *as would barely turn the scale of preference against the latter, without giving the loaf on cheaper terms to the consumer.* The English producer would lose his market, and (setting aside the indirect loss and ruin that must be entailed on our manufacturers by the inability of the rural classes to purchase their wrought goods) would the consumer, even on the most narrow and restricted view of the subject—would the consumer, on a wide or narrow view, be in any possible or conceivable shape advantaged by this reduction? Not in any mode or degree. One shilling, or two shillings, or three shillings a quarter would produce no difference *in the price of the loaf.* The tradesman and mechanic of the city must pay the same, while the farmer and labourer in the country would be ruined.

Deprive the latter of the custom of their intra-mural fellow-countrymen—they are left, *ipso facto*, without the means of purchasing the hard and soft wrought wares manufactured in the towns.

Put the case *vice versa*, and the result is the same. Injury inflicted on any one great class of the community reacts inevitably and perniciously upon all others. Thus the only party (with the exception of a few dozens of individual speculators) whom the Whig proposition could serve is the foreign grower, who of course would be glad enough to exchange his wheat for our gold as long as we should have the gold to give him.

Without taking up time in discussing the abstract soundness of free trade principles, it is apparent to sensible people that, always carrying with us the obligations of fairness and justice to others, we must guide our policy by a consideration of the overruling circumstances, natural and artificial, whereby we are surrounded and inevitably affected. The present circumstances of the English agriculturist—the comparatively inferior quality of his average soil—the superior range of living of his labourers and of labour wages in this country—combine to prove that he could not, without consequences destructive to himself, incur the shock of sudden and absolutely unmodified competition with foreigners. It is quite unbusiness-like to weave endless conjectures as to what improved or cheaper cultivation *might possibly*, at some future period, enable the British husbandman to do. We must look at things *as they are*, at his present inability for what is called “free” competition with the foreign grower,—while, on the other hand, great changes must take place before a fixed immoveable duty on Corn could be possible or practicable, not to say desirable.

As to the notion that foreigners would enter upon a system of barter with us—that, in their existing dispositions, they would be willing to take our manufactures in exchange for their wheat;—after the example of the German Protective League, of the new American Tariff, and the declared inexorable policy of Russia—with these and many such examples before our eyes, the thing does really does appear somewhat *too* absurd for lengthened and serious argument.—

Both the farming and the trading people of the empire should ever be wakeful to this great and manifest truth—that the only genuine system of barter is that which exists between themselves. The farmer does really pay, with the product of his industry, for the wrought goods of the manufacturer;—the manufacturer, in salutary reciprocation, pays, with the produce of *his* industry, for the corn and beef supplied by the agriculturist.

Pass through what subordinate gradations it may, our intra-national dealing, carried on amongst ourselves, comes to this:—The farmer supports the manufacturer—the manufacturer sustains the farmer. One helps the other to bear his respective burthen. Either one, apart from his neighbour, falls helplessly to the ground.—In the name of all that is dear and valuable to us—of the care for our imperial and individual prosperity—of every thing that binds us one to the other as the most glorious section of the human family that ever existed on the earth—let us by all means give their weight to these truths, when estimating the wisdom of the politicians who would exclude such considerations from their projects of social and commercial movement.

Passing from the Corn Law scheme of the Whigs, and from the Free-trade theories—the latter sound, peradventure, in the abstract, but impracticable, under present circumstances, in the highly-modified accidents of British society—it may not be denied that while the old Corn Law had its points of merit, it was by no means free from defects of detail:—

Reasonable men in these days are always ready to admit that when wheat rises to 60*s.* a quarter, and continues to rise, a moderate and gradually-expanding facility of import is required. In its imperfect adaptation to this object lay a flaw in the law of 1828. *Up to the price of 68s.* the duty stood so high, and fell so slowly, that importation to any mentionable extent was to all intents and purposes prohibited—while from 68*s.* to 72*s.* the duty declined with a rapidity that led to the frequently-recurring danger of sudden glut and panic. This was a glaring and palpable evil, grievous to consumers and mischievous to producers. It did not operate, as would Lord John Russell's scheme, to *exclude* corn in dear years, and admit it in seasons of abundance; but it did create inconveniences, the inevitable concomitants of sudden revulsions of price, and of facilities for undue and unhealthful speculation.

The Whigs went out of office. People had found that with all their volubility of theorising the position of matters grew *worse* under their guidance;—from the midst of peace we had plunged into war—the surplus revenue of 1829-'30 had dwindled to a bankruptising deficit,—we had been prosperous, but had fallen to the predicament of general depression;—there was danger abroad—there was turbulent and threatening discontent at home. The country tired of the sickening scene, and Sir Robert Peel was called into power. Sir Robert responded to the call; he looked at the situation of public affairs—he listened to the alarming representations of the expelled Ministers. He had no vain hope of an immediate return of prosperity. Too true it was, as he plainly declared in the House of Commons,

that in escaping from the depth of depression to which we had fallen "we must for years expect to struggle with difficulty," before our ultimate extrication from the overwhelming embarrassments, foreign and domestic, that pressed and menaced us on every side.

It is well to remember these things. Lord Palmerston prophesied that the new Ministers *could not* carry on the Government—could not devise measures that would retrieve the Finances, or in any way relieve the national embarrassments. Sir Robert Peel admitted the difficulty, but he expressed hope;—he made no pretensions to miracle-working powers, but protested against the assumption that the ruin of England was necessarily and inevitably at hand—that the spirit of her people was broken for ever—that her recuperative energies were utterly exhausted. He promised to do his utmost, calmly, cautiously, but vigorously, to apply some remedy to the miserable state of collapse in which he found the public resources of the empire.

When Parliament assembled in 1842, the Minister was ready with his plans. First came the plan for an altered scale of Corn Duties. Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley, Mr. Gladstone, and other principal members of the new Government, had, in the session of 1841, said plainly and unequivocally that they saw no grounds of sound state policy—no great feature in the aspect of the times—to induce them to sanction a departure from the principle of a sliding scale; but they publicly added to this declaration, that to the detail items of the existing scale they would by no means bind themselves. The election of 1841 took place amid the public notoriety of these declarations. In 1842 the Ministers adhered to them.

But there were anomalies and imperfections in the old scale, which called loudly for amendment, and to the correction of these defects the Ministers had applied themselves. At certain ranges of prices there was a nominal duty exceedingly high, tending to create prejudice and jealousy against the landed interest, but the bulk of which duty was but a name—was inoperative—a *brutum fulmen*—a nonentity except upon paper. Now this was a circumstance that no sincere friend of the agriculturist would wish to see unchanged. In years of cheapness, for instance, the nominal duty on foreign wheat might be at 40s. a quarter, or more. Here was an injustice to the landholder. It degraded him in the opinion of those of his countrymen who had no inclination, perhaps no opportunity, to make themselves acquainted with the real state of facts, and who had been studiously misinformed that the whole of this nominal duty went into his pocket in the shape of extra price. When in a year of abundant growth, wheat in England is at 40s. or 45s. the quarter, a duty of 20s. is as fully and efficiently protective as could be one of thirty, forty, or fifty shillings. No foreigner, in such seasons, could send his produce here, paying freightage charge and 20s. duty; and it is my firm conviction that no Englishman, be he a workman or not, would *wish* for any such unfair intrusion of foreigners on the subsistence of his farming fellow-subjects. Englishmen, in cheap years, would be at least as willing to give their gold or their labour for the cheap loaf of their own countrymen as for the cheap loaf of the foreigner.

To get rid of the evils of the old scale, and to retain the most valu-

able portion of its principle, the new plan of Corn Duties appears to me (after painful and patient study of its properties) to be excellently well adapted. Its peculiar distinctive characteristic is this—that it provides for the admission of food from abroad, in a ratio meetly proportioned with the requirements of the public consumption. Under the old law, when prices were from 70s. to 71s., the duty was 10s. 8d.;—when prices rose to 71s., duty fell to 6s. 8d.;—at 72s., it was only 2s. 8d.; and at 73s. the duty fell to the nominal one of a shilling per quarter. By this system of “jumping,” as it has been termed, speculators—not farmers, but men with large capitals and convenient consciences, in Mark-lane and elsewhere—were tempted to *combine* for the purpose of raising the apparent average price, and bringing it to the point at which they could introduce foreign corn on terms the most advantageous to themselves. By this the consumer was cheated—the supply was kept out of the market at the time when it was most required—and the farmer was subjected to the odium of “high prices” which he did not receive, but which went into the treasury of some fraudulent gambler on ‘Change.

Here was the main and practical defect of the law of 1828. It was one which the malpractices of a small knot of individuals turned to purposes fraught with mischief to every section of the people. By the Act of 1842 this fault has been very effectually mended. Instead of a duty of 10s. 8d. with prices at 70s., and of 1s. at 73s., the present duty is only 4s. at 70s., falling gradually, *shilling by shilling* with the rise in price, till it meets the minimum duty of 1s. at 73s. No jumping—no inducement to “hold”—to force up prices while the people are in want of food—every inducement to sell—none whatever to speculate on the chances of “starvation point” and the low duty. This latter kind of pernicious speculation is crushed—trampled down for ever—rendered not merely imprudent, but insane—placed in a position of direct antagonism with the pecuniary interests of the dealers in grain. The honesty of some of these gentlemen is measured but too uniformly by the probabilities of profit;—fair dealing by the public will hereafter hold out the best prospect of gain for themselves;—and this, I take it, is about the most satisfactory conceivable guarantee for of their integrity.

The revision of the duties on Barley, Oats, and the inferior qualities of grain, proceeding in a kindred spirit with the Wheat scale, I need not refer to in detail. Take in its entirety this new scale of Corn Duties, and I cannot help expressing my conviction that its harmonising boldness and prudence place it amongst the most worthy and wisely-planned measures in the records of public transactions. It has this great and laudable quality—a quality to be prized above all flourish “brilliancy”—that it abolishes previous evils without creating new ones—it does what is necessary, and there it stops. It is one of effect for the permanent welfare of our entire community—not a bubble pander to passing popularity, nor to feverish prejudices, clamour where they may.

A few words anent the much-talked-of Canada Flour Bill. There has been really a most unconscionable quantity of blind, ignorant, unmeaning “babblement” expended upon this matter. Now the mea-

sure, though very properly conferring advantages on the Colony, instead of giving them to foreigners, is, with regard to the separate interest of England, an affair of exceedingly trivial import. Under the old system, flour from Canada, the growth of the province or of the United States, has come into England at a duty ranging from 5s. to 1s. * * *—Government, with the intention of giving a fair degree of preference over foreigners to our fellow-subjects in the colonies, proposed to transfer the duty to the border between the States and Canada, and there levy a duty of three shillings a quarter on American wheat crossing the border—all flour shipped to England from Canada to be admitted at the one shilling duty.

This, without descending to crotchets, is the substance of the proposed change, which in truth is *no* change at all as regards the interest of producers or consumers in England. The principal feature of the measure is, that to the extent of its operation it will give Canadian millers, carriers, &c., a preferential encouragement over foreigners.

The productive capabilities of the province itself are a subject of very distant speculation. American produce coming through Canada will be conveyed here in British vessels, and this will be some advantage to our mercantile marine. As to the agriculture of England, the effects of the Bill upon this particular will be imperceptible either way—whether for good or for evil. People at home have very little interest in the Bill, except insofar as it serves the colonist; and this is certainly an object of which all parties ought to feel desirous. I do not flatter folks in England to expect any very extensively beneficial effects from the measure. It can do us very little good, and by no possibility can it do any harm. Our interest in it, I beg to repeat, is confined to the satisfaction wherewith we must contemplate the adoption of every fair and moderate enactment conducing to draw closer the bonds of amity between ourselves and the most important of our colonial possessions—to the further contentment and prosperity of our fellow-subjects all over the world.

THE NEW TARIFF.

One of the most important legislative measures propounded within the last century, was Sir Robert Peel's proposition for the reconstruction of our general system of Import Duties—a department of our national polity with respect to which careful and dispassionate revision was demanded by a just consideration of the real and substantial interest of all classes in the state. Of the improvements effected by this great state measure, not the least salutary have appeared to me the relaxations of taxes upon the raw materials of Manufactures. On a calm and honest view of the condition of this empire,

* * * *Those who have not much acquaintance with the subject may require to be reminded, that the difficulty and expense of transit to Great Britain from the Corn-growing States near the Upper Lakes, go to equalise the apparent differential duty as between this and the produce of other foreign countries.*

it is readily seen that the welfare of our great mercantile and manufacturing interests should stand amongst the primary objects of the sound politician. The British manufacturer, as well as the agriculturist, has his peculiar advantages over the foreigner;—but not unalloyed with disadvantages. To encourage and reward the industry of the townsman, without injuring that of the rural districts—here is one of the guiding lights of that true political wisdom to which the noblest aspirations of British patriotism may be profitably directed.

I see no mode by which, under all the circumstances, this object could have been more effectually forwarded than by enabling the manufacturer, in his several departments, to import, upon easier terms, the raw articles of external production consumed and worked up in the pursuit of his calling—*reducing the price your manufacturing trader has to pay foreigners for the raw materials which his skill and industry convert into articles of wear and use.*

Those who have a taste for arithmetical delectations I would refer to the published returns of *the imports of raw materials of manufacture since the New Tariff has been in operation.* They will find that the aggregate importation of a number of articles, by the consumption of which the briskness or depression of manufacturing proceedings may be tested—that the import of many such articles has increased in an extraordinary degree within the year last gone by. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated in the House of Commons, on the 9th of last May, that “the import of olive oil, an article which is generally used in many branches of manufactures, had increased from 1,500,000 to 3,800,000 gallons, thereby indicating that there was a demand for articles into the manufacture of which olive oil enters, beyond that which prevailed in the previous year”—when the Right Honourable Gentleman said this, and further stated that the consumption of various other essential manufacturing ingredients (testing the briskness or depression of trade) had also vastly increased within the same period—he spoke not on empty hearsay, but from matter-of-fact Parliamentary documents to which every man in the country may have access.

The Cotton Manufacture has grown to such prodigious weight and importance amongst the industrial avocations of the English people, that it is not too much to affirm that its inveterate and irrecoverable depression would involve the most serious calamities to our entire population. We all remember the howling horrors of stagnation and distress which pervaded the manufacturing districts when Sir Robert Peel and his Ministry undertook the revision of our Commercial Code. We remember too that in June, 1841, before Sir Robert Peel came into power, and in September of the same year, immediately after he had accepted it—that on these and sundry occasions the Premier reiterated his reluctant admission that the country was in an unusually embarrassed position—that our prospects were most unsatisfactory—that the condition of the industrious people—of those, more especially, who were engaged in the various branches of the cotton and woollen manufactures—was deplorable in the extreme. We were badly off at that time, and to complete the misery of our predicament,

we were on the downward road. Things were getting worse instead of better.—What is now the aspect of things? We are not yet well off, but our condition is an improving one. We have, as sailors say, “altered our heading,” and are now on the mending tack.

Instance the Cotton Manufacture. Within the last year made up the quantity taken out for home consumption has increased to 537,000,000lbs, against 458,000,000lbs. in the preceding year. In the course of less than a single year, the employment afforded to the artisans and workpeople engaged in the Cotton Manufacture rises in the ratio of one-fifth of the whole amount. But this is not all. The proportionate improvement is much larger for that section of the year in which the new Import Laws have had time to develop their effects. In the last three months out of the twelve the relative amounts stood thus—1,625,000lbs. in 1843 against 1,100,000lbs. in 1842—being a difference favourable to 1843, in the proportion of more than one-third of the average for the corresponding periods of these two years.—As time advances the improvement becomes more marked—the consumption for the *month* preceding Mr. Goulburn’s calculations having increased in a ratio still more rapid. Thus, as the measures to which I have referred acquire time to develope themselves, the symptoms of improvement—of the much wished-for “revival of trade”—become more marked and manifest.

I say with perfect candour, that up to the present moment the manufacturing people of the country are far, alas! far removed from that state of comfort and security in which I desire to see them. But let this simple fact be noted—that two years ago they were going down—that they are now, in homely language, “going up.” The consumption of coffee, tea, and of many other great leading commodities that conduce to the people’s comfort—the consumption of many such articles has largely and proveably increased; and further, the consumption of the raw materials of manufacture—of the articles the use of which gives the people employment whereby to earn the means of purchasing the comforts and necessities of life—the consumption of these articles has gone on increasing in a manner the more cheering because gradual and steady—becoming more marked and rapid as time proceeds—as the modifications of 1842 mature themselves to their ultimate tendency. I dwell not on individual weeks and months;—the point is, that the *scope and tone* of our position are more healthful and hopeful than for years they had been.

Thus, struggling though we still are, with a tissue of depressing circumstances, beneath the burthen of which the energies of another people would be crushed and paralysed, there is this great consoling feature—that our movement is an *improving* one—that the *tide* has once more been turned—that there is hope in the future—that all is not gloom and terror—that in looking for what is to come, we shudder not in agonised dread of trials more grievous than those we have already passed through.

And in what aspect of the world has this great change in the *tone* of public affairs been so providentially accomplished?

It was a time when the foreign nations with whom our intercourse was most extensive were adopting measures against our commerce

which, spring from what subsidiary causes they might, had, *per se*, a direct and potent tendency to diminish the demand for wrought articles of British produce—a time, too, when the monetary difficulties of many of these states rendered them powerless, even if well disposed, to deal extensively for our manufactures. My object is a public one, and I have no disposition to be personally invidious;—I shall therefore not insist at any length on the degree of practical influence attributable to Lord Palmerston's diplomacy, in accounting for the feeling that led to the late stringent Tariff of America, and to the restrictive policy which has grown up in France; but I cannot forego the remark, that it is somewhat remarkable that, in the face of these unfavourable circumstances, French and American—in the face of the restrictions for which, in the opinion of many observers, the Whig policy at the Foreign Office inevitably and indisputably paved the way, and which had become matters of self-evident certainty when that faction went out—it is, I say, something more than remarkable that in spite of these adverse influences, and of the equally disadvantageous position of affairs in the Peninsula, in China, in Russia, in all points of the globe—that with such embarrassments to contend against, the condition of the great staple manufactures of this country, sinking rapidly two years ago, has, in less than twelve months from the time when Sir Robert Peel's measures began to work their object, been so far retrieved, that if not actually thriving, they are at all events not hopelessly depressed. Here, at least, is matter of comfort—of profitable contemplation for those who found their judgment of public men upon stuff more sterling than factious clamour, and who take practical results as something worth consideration in balancing the value of political theories.* * *

Those clauses of the New Tariff which provide for the admission, upon certain terms, of Foreign Live Stock for consumption in this country, have been the subject of much unscrupulous misrepresentation, and of not less absurd and unfounded apprehensions. The enemies of Government have been rather inconsistent and self-contradictory in the conduct of their attacks upon this portion of the measure. Speaking to the ultra-Free-Traders—to those who, neither as to time nor degree, will qualify their demands for the demolition of every thing bearing even the form of protective duties—they have told these latter persons that the modified Tariff is a mockery—a delusion

* * * *A remarkable illustration of the progressive operation of the new law is supplied by the Revenue returns published to the 5th of July, 1843.—On the YEAR there is a falling-off in the Customs' and Excise Revenue, as compared with the year ended July 5th, 1842;—but on the QUARTER ending July 5th, 1843, as compared with the corresponding one of 1842, there is a marked increase in these branches of the public income. We here have a pleasing example of the ripening MATURITY of the law's tendency increasing people's means of procuring the comforts of life—the DECREASE accruing from the former portion of the year, when the new regulations had not had time for effect—the INCREASE being on the latter portion of the twelve months, when their practical influence began to be better understood & experienced.*

—that the apparent relaxations maintain, in full practical force, the prohibition of foreign cattle.

These representations have been disproved—foreign cattle have been imported.

To the farmers, on the other hand—to graziers, cattle-dealers, and those who might be supposed apprehensive of all steps that could in any way operate to reduce the value of agricultural produce—the conscientious gentry in question have held a very different tone. The permission to import foreign cattle, on payment of a considerable duty, was, in ringing the alarm-bell amongst these circles, declared tantamount to the “annihilation” of British pasture-farming. No more land, it was roundly announced, need be kept under cultivation, for the foreigner was to come in, and deprive the men of Norfolk and Lincolnshire and Essex of even the chance of a sale for their stock. From almost every port on the coasts of continental Europe—from North and South and West and East—we were to be forthwith overwhelmed with invasions of stock, unneeded by the British consumer—ruinous to the British producer. The utmost efforts were made, to excite *panic* in the minds of farmers and feeders. The attempt, unfortunately, was to some extent successful—being much aided by the (indiscretion I shall call it, for civility’s sake) by the indiscretion of certain self-dubbed friends of the agricultural interest. Many farmers did fall into the trap, and were betrayed into an unfounded alarm approaching to what is called a “panic.” Sales of stock were hurried forward, at prices not commensurate with the supply and demand, but with the silly alarms whereby some folks allowed themselves to be affected. A few foreign cattle made their bow in Smithfield. With the officious help of a sapient Alderman, and of Mr. Salesman Venables, the thing was trumpeted into a fearful presage of the coming invasion. A hundred little circumstances, weighing nothing in themselves, were taken for collateral evidences of the “levelling” nature of the measure.

Now what were the grounds of all this alarm (there certainly was no *reason* for it)? The gross introduction of Foreign Stock, ever since the New Tariff has been law, has not exceeded a few days’ show in the single market of Smithfield alone. This, too, in the full flush of feverish expectation—when the gaping eagerness of speculators at home and abroad had been wound up to its height by brawling alarmists of all casts. There was nothing in this to make farmers afraid; but the *panic* came, and it passed not without doing mischief.

In the beginning of last year, prices of meat, by the admission of all parties—of the best friends of landowners and landholders—were unhealthfully high. They were proceeding to a point which, as was clearly manifest, could not be maintained without creating the most angry and malignant emotions in the bosoms of those who had been misinstructed to think that all is gain to the occupiers of land, and all hardship and injustice to the other sections of society. To protect the consumer against the privations that must always be experienced in the progress of prices to the extreme point—to protect the farmer from the ruinous consequences to which he must ever be exposed during the continuance of a system of frequent and violent revulsions—the

provision against either of these reproductive evils stands forth amongst the prominent qualities of the new regulations.

Since the New Tariff has been in force, a great revolution has taken place in the price of animal food. Truly there has, and we may profitably examine the connection of this reduction with the operation of the law. Evident it is, that the *quantity* of foreign cattle imported could have no intrinsic effect to influence prices either way. The acknowledgment of the principle of importation might and must have had a certain degree of moderating influence. The acknowledgment of this principle gave to false friends of the country interest a loophole—a pretext—flimsy enough, but still a pretext—for exciting violent alarms amongst the more credulous of the graziers and farmers. Added to this, the season of 1842 was far more productive than had been any of the five preceding. Fodder for cattle was in greater abundance; cattle were more plenty and in better condition. A greater quantity of British-grown meat was *produced*. Take then into account the slack *demand* for meat during the major portion of the year 1842—during that part of it, especially, wherein the *symptoms of reviving trade had not yet made their appearance, and accumulations of stock, flowing from the small demand and consumption, were thrown on the graziers' hands*.

I have submitted a few heads, to each of which may be ascribed its probable share in creating the depression of price. Had the production of last year been as scanty as those of the years 1837 to '41, and the provisions of the New Tariff not been in existence, matters would have come to a perilous crisis—inflammatory agitation, stimulated by the aggravated sufferings of the poor, might have ran its course amongst the masses of the towns. I dwell not on the probable consequences;—men who find pleasure in sombre meditations may here find wherewithal to content their humour.

As things stand, however, the painful contingency of continued bad seasons has been in some measure provided against. The New Tariff is so adjusted that when prices threaten to mount to an unfair and extravagant height, unjust to consumers and dangerous to producers—that in such emergencies a mediating power should step in, and bring things to an equilibrium.

Herein is the keystone of the new system. Taken in the maturity of its compass, it operates to give the English producer a remunerating market for his commodity, while it further achieves that which was an all-important desideratum—it *extinguishes the possibility of dearth in England*. Its leading characteristic (as I have already noticed in the case of the New Corn Duties) is this—that in years of abundance, when plenty of meat is produced at home, the law will be virtually inoperative. The absolute value of live stock in such years will be too low to enable the foreigner to pay a duty, the relative bulk of which rises, as the value of the article falls—to pay this duty, besides incurring the heavy expense and risk of the deep-sea carriage of unwieldy living animals.—In a dear year, on the other hand, when, without importation, our increasing numbers must suffer from scarcity of food—in seasons of such a character the expectation of a good price will induce foreigners to send us a sufficient supply; and still, as prices

fall, the inducement to import again declines, and mischievous interference with the reward of British industry is thus discouraged. *This disposition of the law should be fairly marked—that the inducements to importation falls with the fall and rises with the rise of price.* When the article is really required, it is admitted; when not required, the import drops, to recommence at the time of need. In brief, the English producer has a full and fair measure of preferential encouragement. In years when his production is really sufficient to meet the wants of the community, he is secure in the enjoyment of his countrymen's "custom." So likewise is he in dear years;—here too he is ensured a preference for his produce;—and there is this additional advantage to himself and to the nation, that when he comes to market with a manifestly insufficient stock—when the inhabitants of the country cannot obtain food enough from the produce of our own soil—the New Tariff here springs into life:—It mars not the remuneration of the farmer—it still gives him his market for *all* his produce—helps him to do that which, unassisted, he is confessedly unable to perform—makes up the actual deficiency of food—continues to the English grower the 'vantage ground over foreigners—but relieves him from the perilous and pernicious odium of absolute prohibition in a time of scarcity.

On many other articles of general consumption—on Coffee for instance—the duties have been considerably reduced. With respect to Sugar, the great and all-sufficient answer to the shameful proposition of the Whigs—the answer that will be re-echoed by manly, honest, humane, and prudent minds throughout the country—was this:—That England, which has incurred, and is still incurring, such unheard-of sacrifices for the abolition of the thrice-accursed system of slavery all over the earth—that England ought not to be the first nation in the world to set the example of measures which would foster and perpetuate the existence of that foul crime.

Upon *principle* the present Government refused, point-blank, to step out of its way for the purpose of giving encouragement to the Slave-produce of Cuba and Brazil in preference to the produce of the free labourer in our own Colonies. By the sugar-planters of the Brazils and of Cuba the iniquitous Slave Trade is still kept alive. By the Cuban and Brazilian planters thousands and tens of thousands of Negroes are annually kidnapped—two-thirds to expire beneath the indescribable horrors of the Middle Passage—the remainder to perish by the murderous toil which is extorted from them with whip and bludgeon in the blood-stained sugar-fields of their "importers"—or, again, by the slow starvation that awaits them in the woods and jungles to which they fly from the persecutions of their oppressors, and by the fangs of the bloodhounds that are systematically employed to track them to their miserable hiding-places.

Upon principle, then, Sir Robert Peel's Cabinet—any Cabinet not lost to the impulses of true honour—were bound to resist the gratuitous encouragement of the promoters of this accursed system.

Men will not forget that in proportion as you unconditionally encourage the slave produce of foreigners, to the injury of the free produce of your own colonies, to that extent do you support and maintain

the perpetuation of the hideous atrocities to which I have adverted.

And how stood the question on the ground of mere expediency?

Expediency itself—the dictates of keen-eyed selfishness—the immediate comfort and interest of the British people—point plainly to our proper course. The English manufacturer wants markets;—our West India Colonies present an extensive, a secure, and a certainly increasing market. They are amply able, too (now that the “unsettlement” of the Emancipation Act has ran its cycle)—they are amply able, in conjunction with the illimitable productive capabilities of the East Indies, to send us as much sugar as we can possibly consume. The West Indies and the East Indies are ready to send us their sugar, and will be right glad to take large quantities of our wrought goods in return, thus giving employment to the merchant, the manufacturer, the shipper and the artisan at home.

With Brazil and Cuba, on the other hand, our dealings must be at best but precarious. Place your reliance on them, and a momentary freak of the Government of Spain or Brazil might spread starvation and dismay over the households of thousands of Englishmen.

Exclude your Colonial Sugar, or (which is the same thing) give the foreign slave-dealer the power of driving it out of your market. The effect at once comes home to you. Your fellow-subjects in the East and in the West have nothing to *give* you in exchange for your manufacturers. You refuse to take their produce,—they can no longer take yours. You lose their custom for your goods, and your tradesmen and labourers lose one great source of employment. * *

Even were it right or expedient to adopt the Whig proposal respecting foreign Sugar, the time was ill-chosen—the scheme was premature. Great Britain would have been worse than foolish, to make “concessions” without looking to the probabilities of equivalent concessions from the other side. How much of the obstinate temper of Brazil, in relation to her future commercial dealings with Great Britain, may not have resulted from the exhibition made by the late Ministers that there was a party in this country who were ready to say to the Brazilians, “Do not scruple to put what duties you choose on British goods, for any thing you do that way shall not influence *our* conduct “by you?” Were we to give up our vantage-ground—to fling away the power of negotiation, whether referring to Slavery or to terms for the admission of British merchandize—this would truly be playing our cards into the hands of the foreigner.

On this question of foreign slave-raised Sugar, “Her Majesty’s Opposition” have been urging Sir Robert Peel to commit the very mistake which, on another subject, a Noble Viscount most recklessly and unjustifiably imputed to a man to whom England and America owe deep and lasting gratitude—the folly, I mean, of throwing our

* * * *It will be remembered that in 1840 the Whigs OPPOSED a proposition relating to the Sugar Duties, made by Mr. Ewart, and analogous with that propounded by themselves in 1841, when (as some cynical folks insinuate) “difficulties” were to be accumulated, as a patriotic legacy to their successors.*

“bag of equivalents” at the feet of the foreigner, before the latter gave corresponding “equivalents” in exchange.

The Brazilian Commercial Treaty, now approaching its termination, and the threatened increase of duty on British manufactures thereafter entering Brazil, has been much spoken of. Now, referring to our prospects of mercantile intercourse with the southern countries of America, the course of the present Government offers a rare illustration of the practical distinction between prate and performance. The factious individuals who are playing for a call to office have uttered verbose Jeremiads touching certain apprehensions of a falling off in the Brazilian demand for our goods. But these factious individuals, while they held the power of office, did nothing to avert the mischief in the prediction of which they are so lugubriously eloquent. Sir Robert Peel and Lord Aberdeen, on the contrary, have taken active and immediate steps for making the best terms with the young Emperor;—they employed a special Envoy for the purpose. Our objects have not yet been accomplished—the Envoy has returned to England, and new negotiations will probably be set on foot. But let this be understood, that whatever be the ultimate issue of the negotiations—be they successful or apparently the reverse—even if every thing like reasonable terms be rejected by Brazil—a diplomatic operation has been concluded *which will make the exclusion of British goods from the Brazilian territory a matter of physical impossibility*. Soon after undertaking the administration of the Foreign Office, the Earl of Aberdeen succeeded in completing a Commercial Treaty with the contiguous republic of Monte Video, and with other states on the right bank of the river Plate, for the admission, on most favourable conditions, of imports from Great Britain. The Uruguay Republic is included in the arrangements. It borders on Brazil through a great stretch of country, and the Brazilian Government is utterly powerless to prevent the transit of merchandize across the border.—It is, of course, no part of Lord Aberdeen’s plan to abet smuggling in the territory of a friendly power. By no means. But as little is it the business of a British statesman to prevent the industry of his country from finding and seeking its fair reward wheresoever it lists. Lord Aberdeen’s Treaties are with certain independent republics, to open their markets to the enterprise of our merchants and the industry of our producers; and if it *will* so happen that hard goods from Sheffield and Birmingham, and soft goods from Manchester, Leeds and Paisley, find ready, lucrative, and practically unchecked sale amongst the subjects of the neighbouring empire, Brazil can still have no fair ground of complaint against our Government;—all that can be said is, that as in all times things have found their level, and that the English Minister has driven a right good bargain for the nation for whose interests he was concerned.

In private as in public life, contrasts of character and of fortune are continually encountered. While one man is descanting on all the fine things which, on the contingency of a long list of “ifs” and “ors,” *might* be done, another, more energetic, more honest or more able, puts his shoulders to the wheel, and *does* the work. The Whigs would talk volubly for a century about “extending and secur-

“ing markets for the productions of British industry” (this, I think, is the set phrase). Their successors do not talk so much, but look in what quarter you will, and you shall see them sedulously and efficiently *acting*—not in the temper of mischievous meddling, but of ameliorative *completion*.

I have rather digressed from the consideration of the Government's domestic policy. Reverting to it, and glancing to the somewhat bitter preventive of close-impending national bankruptcy—to the rather bitterly-compounded remedy administered by Sir Robert Peel, in the shape of a Tax upon Income—I must frankly avow that, in common with many persons of moderate means, I *did* feel the draught to be a black draught—to be a something I would willingly avoid, could I see any other mode of escaping from a dilemma whereby I, and all who held a stake, however humble, in the stability of peace and order throughout the country, were at that time encompassed.

The Finances of the nation were in a state of collapse. Every year there was a deficit,—every year we seemed to be sinking farther from the hope of extrication from this discreditable and perilous predicament. We were adding to the enormous burthen of our debt—we were swelling the yearly sum paid on account of interest—while the revenue to meet it was fearfully diminishing. Could this go on? *Ought* it to go on? Reason and justice declared that it could not and ought not—that it was discreditable and pernicious to England—that the thing was all rotten, and must inevitably break down.

But how was it to be mended? Whiggery had found a surplus revenue—it left to Sir Robert Peel a yearly-recurring deficit. A remedy was somewhere to be found—the most sound and substantial framework of political institutions that the world had ever looked on would crumble and perish beneath this deadly, ever-gnawing ulcer, corroding the very vitals of the body politic.

A remedy was to be found—and where? Were the masses of the people to be taxed? Were they to be further taxed who already were fiercely suffering by the unprosperous state of trade—who were unable to procure their usual little homely comforts, much less bear the weight of new taxation? It would be unjust—it would be imprudent—in the awful circumstances of the time, until the one alternative became the dissolution of our national entity—it would, I say, have been unjust and imprudent, in any less overruling emergency, to think of getting out of a financial scrape by still farther taxing the poor man's means of subsistence.

By increasing taxation upon articles of general use and consumption, you may cripple the poor man's means. But it does not follow that while you thus injure the the working man and woman, and increase the pressure of taxes—it does not by any means follow that you thereby improve your revenue. Tax more highly an article of which, at the previous rate of price, the artisan and journeyman were just about able to purchase a sufficient supply. The *proportionate* tax is larger, but the gross amount paid is no more. What is added to the *ad valorem* taxation is withdrawn from the Exchequer by diminished consumption. The poor man bears the same burthen for a smaller

supply of the article. He stints himself—he buys less—and the less he buys the less revenue the Minister receives. Thus, in times of public adversity, nothing is effected by this kind of financial trickery save the infliction of aggravated wretchedness upon the poor, and the dispersion, amongst the suffering substratum of society, of incalculable additional incentives to discontent and disaffection.

Of the political truth I have here laid down, the history of our own and of other times affords abundant illustrations, the most recent of which is that of Mr. Francis Thornhill Baring's attempt to increase his revenue—to get a substitute for the revenue he had thrown away—by putting an extra Five per Cent. *ad valorem* on the Customs' Duties.

In the department of Finance, then, the new Government, looking over the the Whig accounts, found themselves as near as possible to that enviable predicament, the notion of which is meant when you talk of a man “in a cleft-stick.” Many ordinary resources of financiers had been annihilated—others were exhausted—others were already “worked” to the straining point. What *was* to be done?—Here was the question. Sir Robert Peel answered it.

I have hinted at the unfavourable prejudice wherewith I had myself entertained the first broaching of the Property Tax. I did feel that it came home to my own position in not the most agreeable manner,—and however small might be my individual contribution, that the fact of its being a *direct* one would make it the more unpleasantly perceptible. My impressions in this respect were those of most others in my situation, and no doubt can for a moment be entertained that the Minister who makes a proposition for a direct impost, of the same amount and degree with the Property Tax, has to encounter, *in limine*, a powerful and very general original sentiment of hostility. An eminent share of constitutional firmness—a high and self-sacrificing honesty of purpose—a resolution to do that which was right and necessary, at the cost, if so it must be, of popularity and official power—a deep and searching sense of the empire's exigencies—an unalterable determination to embarrass themselves—the Ministers—rather than wink at a prolongation of the embarrassments of the nation—without minds moulded in such sentiments as these, the Cabinet of 1841 could never have entertained, and brought forward to maturity, their plan of resolute and uncompromising attack upon the chronic cancer which deplorable mismanagement had brought to the fullness of a pestilent growth.

Not by “the miserable expedient” of reckless loans—not by bungling and heartless schemes to increase the burthen of taxes on the poor—not by the unhealthy project of such a tax upon foreign Corn as, at the present juncture, would have just this effect, that it would starve the consumer in dear years, and ruin the cultivator in years of plenty,—by no such “ingenious devices” as any of these did Sir Robert Peel proceed to solve the problem of the time. His was a plan that told out its own meaning;—men knew its object—they saw the price at which that object was to be obtained. The Premier, in introducing the measure, dealt not in the little mysteries of studied official jargon. He made his statements in the tone of a man who felt profoundly sensible of the great public crisis wherein he had been called

to act, but who felt further that not he nor those around him were more concerned in the issue of that crisis than were the universal people of the country to whose sense and honour and patriotism he made his memorable appeal. By the Prime Minister's great speech on Commerce and Finance, men were plainly informed of the exigencies to be met, and of the actual tendency of the measures proposed to meet them. Not concealing the extent of the sacrifice for which the affluent and the comparatively affluent were appealed to, he unfolded the momentous purposes to which the proceeds of that sacrifice were to be applied,—not alone to the defrayment of the extraordinary charges on the public funds, but to the removal of many of the imposts that pressed most severely on the industry of the working classes—to the mitigation or abolition of sundry imposts which, in their existing shapes, were vexatious and pernicious to many, and substantially profitable to none,—to the facile introduction of various raw materials of industry, such as those I have alluded to in a former place, and the abundance of which does powerfully conduce to the prosperous action of trade—to objects, in short, which, while beneficial to the poor, must act with an influence equally salutary on the position of those whose circumstances brought them within the category of Income-Tax-payers.

The Minister's arguments were admitted to be cogent—to be skillfully arranged and eloquently stated. They were all this, because they were truthful, candid and straightforward—adapted to the time and circumstances, which admitted not of crotchet and mystification. He had told the truth—he had done his duty!

Honest men felt this. They saw him risking his personal position on the effort for the public good. They saw the necessity—they felt the truth and justice of the principle which went to relieve that necessity by other means than a hard and perilous grinding of the poor. The generous and comprehensive wisdom of Englishmen prevailed. The men who were to pay the tax were not backward to confess that the thing was fair and right—that nothing better could be done—that on every enlarged view of the case their own ultimate welfare and security were intimately connected with the success of the Ministerial policy. On the truth and honesty and discretion of the people of this country the united members of the Cabinet had staked the question of their success. Their trust and confidence were not disappointed. A present and definite sacrifice was at once chosen before the base and paltering game of procrastination—before the wretched suicidal work of dalliance with accumulating evils.

Patriotic wisdom has already borne fruit:—Another financial year will scarcely pass over, when the deplorable evil of deficits will have been conquered.

If we turn to the Ministerial management of our dealings and intercourse with Foreign Nations, we shall find almost every passage of this portion of our policy replete with auspicious evidences of the efficacy of intellect, combined with firmness, activity and integrity, in restoring to wholesome and honourable order a chaotic jumble of anomalies—of humiliations and dangers—of fears, hatreds, and confusion

thrice trebly confounded. It is scarcely too much to say that at the time of Lord Melbourne's retirement the nominal peace between England and America was a thing, the maintenance of which for a month, a week, or a day, was altogether uncertain. The two nations were in that position that malice, ignorance, imprudence or over-zeal of a single civil or military subordinate official, might convert, at a tangent, into one of implacable hostility. There were more points than one, through which this danger was to be apprehended in our relations with America.

Pending the Canadian rebellion, a party from Canada, acting under the sanction of the lawful authorities of the province, had captured and burnt an American steam-vessel called the *Caroline*, engaged in the disgraceful work of conveying arms and supplies to the Canadian rebels, and to the (worse than rebel) miscreants from the United States, who took advantage of the disturbances to come over in bodies for the purposes of midnight murder and plunder of British subjects. Life was lost in the struggle for the capture of the boat, and two or three years after (still during the happy dominion of Lord Palmerston at the Foreign Office) Mr. M'Leod, one of the British party which boarded the *Caroline*, was arrested in the United States, and deliberately charged with the “murder!” of an American killed in the conflict—the English, be it observed, having acted substantially in self-defence, by taking active steps to put an end to the unlawful proceedings of a gang of fellows who were furthering and succouring a marauding and piratical invasion of our territory. M'Leod was arrested and committed for trial. Would it be credited—would it for one instant be thought possible—that an individual who, through any conceivable combination of accidents, had arrived at the station of one of her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, would all this time have remained inactive? But so it was. Not for a length of time did the then Foreign Minister of Great Britain think proper to make even a simple intimation to America that the affair in which the *Caroline* was destroyed was one that the British Government recognised, and for the consequences of which we held ourselves nationally responsible. No such communication did Lord Palmerston vouchsafe, until the prosecution of M'Leod was much advanced, and it was too late to save England from the humiliation of seeing one of the Queen's subjects insultingly and injuriously put upon his trial, on a charge of murder founded on a gallant and praiseworthy achievement—that of defending the homes and hearths of Englishmen from rapine, massacre, and all imaginable outrage. Had the Whigs gone out six months earlier, it is not likely that these proceedings would have been tolerated; but matters were as I have stated when Lord Palmerston left office.

I do not stop to calculate how far the moral influence of the change of Ministers may have operated in causing the acquittal of M'Leod, who, six months previously, had been devoted to death by brawling demagogues all over the Union. Suffice it to say that M'Leod, a British subject, who “was to have been” hanged by the New Yorkers while the Whigs were in place here, was *acquitted and liberated* when our official men were changed.

But the very fact of his having been tried formed a most dangerous

precedent—a precedent which, if not precluded from possible recurrence, must keep the two nations in the constant jeopardy of war—the danger being doubly aggravated by the *then* unsettled position of the North Eastern Boundary question

For this reason, if for no other, it was highly requisite that we should have some permanent understanding with the Washington authorities.

But there was another question—a question of vital, all-absorbing moment—a question which for sixty years had kept alive and active the elements of strife and discord between the British and American people—a question that gave rise to frequent unseemly and irritating contests between the civil (very nearly between the military) authorities of our colony of New Brunswick and those of a “friendly” state—a question which, as was justly remarked by a distinguished public man, was the one which lay at the root of other misunderstandings—embittering and inflaming other disputes, and embarrassing all efforts for amicable settlement. The question I allude to is that respecting the Boundary between the state of Maine (a member of the Republican Union) and the British province of New Brunswick, as to the line intended to be defined by the Treaty of Independence.

At the close of the American Revolutionary War, when the independence of the Colonies was acknowledged by the mother country, a Treaty was entered into for the purpose, amongst other matters, of defining and describing the line of boundary between the United States and those parts of the British Territory which bordered thereon. The country, at that time, had never been perfectly surveyed, and, as it has since turned out, the description of the Boundary line, and of the marks by which it was to be known, was any thing but plain and distinct. The dispute has been as to the *meaning* of the Treaty—as, for instance, when “hills” are mentioned, whether they are hills lying so far north, or another chain of elevations more towards the south—and so forth. For sixty years the discussion had been carried on with mutual pertinacity, always interfering with friendship and good feeling, and keeping up the danger of sudden war.

The proceedings upon this question had, in the ten years antecedent to 1842, reached such an unparalleled pitch of embitterment and complication (a settlement having, by Lord Palmerston’s own account, become “altogether hopeless” during part of that interval), and every successive movement had been so strikingly unfavourable to the claims and hopes of this country—that our honour and interest equally required the appointment of some discreet, experienced, influential, and fully-empowered Ambassador, having the intimate knowledge of the state of public feeling in America, as well as at home, that should guide him, in language, action, and demeanour, to every step most conducive to the honour and advantage of his country.

If there were one man in England, whose experience, whose known business tact and ability—whose thorough acquaintance with every feature of the dispute, and with the respective parties therein—and whose great personal stake in the greatness and prosperity of Great Britain—qualified him, in a degree paramount beyond all thought of comparison, for the delicate and critical duties of this honourable but most onerous mission—the man who stood preeminent in

these qualifications was Alexander Baring Baron Ashburton. This eminent person had been, for a period extending over half-a-century, so circumstanced that his intercourse with America and the Americans was unequalled in its extent and scarcely interrupted in its continuity. None but those who have had the opportunity of personal observation can form an idea of the influence of the Barings throughout the whole Union, and this influence had an unquestionable tendency to give weight and countenance to any proposal emanating from the head of that distinguished family. In addition to this, his Lordship's lengthened residence made him so much alive to every shade of the American disposition, that a "false step"—an imprudent movement or remark on his part—were matters quite beyond the limits of probability. He was, in short, the man whom the crisis needed; and if the interests of England were to be skilfully, judiciously, and successfully represented, Lord Ashburton was the man to represent them.

But if Lord Ashburton were the man of all men the most likely to make terms advantageous to this country, it did by no means follow, as a matter of course, that the undertaking was the kind of thing that would best consort with the personal comfort and convenience of a gentleman in his position, who had left middle age behind him. He had manifested no desire for diplomatic distinctions; he had for some years taken no very active part in political affairs; and in possession of all the blessings which elevated station, a princely fortune, and a life passed in honour, bring with them in England, was about the last person in the world for whom a fatiguing voyage across the Atlantic, on an enterprise surrounded by doubt and dispute, could have any charm. The circumstances of the time, too, were any thing but encouraging. The whole affair was studded with difficulties, the most perplexing and unmanageable of which had grown up in the lapse of the previous ten years; and the business was one that would have been exceedingly distasteful to any one at all swayed by the ordinary impulses of personal vanity.

Let me shortly explain a few of these difficulties:—

The Americans had not such strong motives as we had, for wishing to come to a settlement; for they had for years been permitted to make progressive encroachments on our territory, and a large portion of that which was the subject of dispute had been practically surrendered by Lord Palmerston. The latter Noble Lord had given up the principle of the exclusive sovereignty of Great Britain, though his Lordship's predecessors, and the Governors of the province of New Brunswick, had theretofore maintained the exclusive right of England.—Viz.:—

In the year 1827 Sir Howard Douglas was Governor of the British province of New Brunswick. An American citizen named Baker came upon the territory, and by certain acts asserted the jurisdiction of the United States. Sir Howard Douglas, with the intrepid prudence—the true prudence for men who hold a critical trust at a critical juncture—with the spirited and dignified prudence and gallantry that have accompanied him through life—forthwith arrested Mr. Baker. A great outcry was raised by the Maine-men. War and

rumours of war—fierce menaces, and boisterous denunciations of the English—were immediately the order of the day. The English Governor took the matter very calmly. He detained Mr. Baker, and had him tried, in the regular course of law, for an offence committed within the British dominions. The prisoner was convicted, and sentenced to fine and imprisonment. Great was the clamour in America—Sir Howard was perfectly polite, but not less determined. Mr. Baker *did not like to pay*, but he did pay, nevertheless. The British authorities of *that day* would not let him go until he paid.

Here was the true course of firmness and justice and dignity ;—the beacon conduct for men to whom is confided the guardianship of the interests of a mighty people.

And now to a glance at Lord Palmerston's proceedings :—

On the very Territory where Sir Howard Douglas had arrested Baker, for questioning the supremacy of our country—on this very ground the Viscount Palmerston, when at the head of the Foreign Office, *permitted the erection of American forts*, Fort Jarvis and Fort Fairfield—the latter, as if in derision of our surrender of supremacy, bearing the name of the man who had made himself most remarkable for hostility to our claims—on this very Territory Lord Palmerston permitted the establishment of American troops and military stations, and thus made a “capitulation” of the essence of our cause.

Be this not forgotten for his Lordship, who, since his exit from Downing Street, has had the coolness to criticise the terms of Lord Ashburton's Treaty! In 1831 an American named Griesley entered the Territory, to take a census in the name of the Americans—thus again making an assertion of their right. As under Sir Howard Douglas, Griesley was arrested, but, by order of Lord Palmerston, *was released without punishment*. Thus encouraged, Griesley recommenced his aggressive and unlawful proceedings, was again arrested, and *again released on the same order*. Sir Howard Douglas, sustained by the Home Government of 1829, had been unrelaxing in the adoption of determined measures to maintain, in unscathed integrity, the undivided supremacy of Great Britain, and keep the Americans within their own own bounds,—Lord Palmerston looked on, in 1835-'8, while the Americans built forts and planted troops on the ground claimed by England! I leave these facts to speak their own commentary.

Lord Ashburton, therefore, when he arrived in America, found matters in this position :—The *principle* of right which Lord Aberdeen and Sir Howard Douglas had so strenuously preserved had been virtually abandoned by Lord Palmerston. Even Lord Sydenham, the Whig-appointed Governor of Canada, had denounced the surrenders made during Lord Palmerston's Foreign Administration. The Americans were elated by the successive encroachments that had been tolerated by us,—they were universally opposed to any “concession” by their own Government.

I shall not go into any comment upon the *disposition* towards England that had been generated amongst Americans by Lord Palmerston's mode of transacting business. I have no desire to pass severe reflections on the Noble Viscount, nor in any way to make a personal allusion to his conduct, unless where it may be rendered necessary by

the public interest and the fair understanding of the questions I am considering. Waiving, therefore, all animadversion of a personal nature, I come to the point—how stood the Boundary Question when Lord Ashburton went over, and what were the terms he obtained?

Notwithstanding all the difficulties of the undertaking, and all his peculiar inducements to “sit at home in ease,” Lord Ashburton made sacrifice of every consideration of private choice and comfort to the object of endeavouring to effect an adjustment of the difference that threatened the peace, the security, and all the best interests of the English and the Americans. He saw and appreciated the emergency—the vigorous, comprehensive, and statesmanlike policy of the English Ministry; and duty whispered that the time was not one wherein honest and patriotic men should hesitate between private convenience and the welfare of millions of fellow-beings.

Lord Ashburton accordingly proceeded to the United States.

On arriving in America, he found a general impression that the United States' claims were absolutely right, and a deeply-rooted indisposition to give up “the shadow of a shade” of any particle of these claims. This impression, it is but fair to say, had been materially strengthened by the courses taken and tolerated by England for some years previously. *We had descended from the high ground of the practical maintenance of absolute right; we had allowed America to build forts and quarter soldiers within the disputed territory.*

Talk of “capitulation!”

Several years ago the dispute on the Boundary was referred for arbitration to the King of the Netherlands (whose title, by the Belgian Revolution of 1830, was soon afterwards curtailed to that of King of Holland). The King of Holland gave his decision;—but the public position of the arbitrator had changed in the interval from the reference—America refused to be bound by his judgment, *though he awarded to the United States a great deal more than has Lord Ashburton's Treaty.* But Lord Palmerston thought the decision so advantageous to England that for years he kept pressing America to abide by it. America refused; Lord Palmerston insisted. The terms, he thought, were so favourable to us as to make the matter well worth a war of “notes.” But America was inflexible—his Lordship's “cleverness” was (fortunately) unavailing.

Compare the territorial terms of this decision, to which Lord Palmerston endeavoured to get the assent of America—compare them with the terms obtained by Lord Ashburton.

Of a tract of country in dispute between the respective Governments, amounting in round numbers to about 7,000,000 acres, the King of Holland awarded to America some 4,400,000, and to Great Britain 2,600,000 acres.

These were the terms which Lord Palmerston vainly pressed America to accept.

Of this same tract of country (adhering to round numbers) Lord Ashburton's Treaty gives America 3,600,000 acres, and retains for England 3,400,000—and this, too, after the late British Ministry, by allowing the establishment of American troops and strongholds on the territory, had abandoned the whole principle of our sovereign right.

E.-g.,

The Plenipotentiary despatched by Sir Robert Peel and Lord Aberdeen obtained from America, even *after* our practical cession of right, a third more ground than Lord Palmerston, *before* that cession had been made, would have been too glad to get (but could not). Lord Ashburton obtained all this, though he went to America at a time when the minds of the people of that country were prepared to refuse any concession whatsoever.

I deal in no asperities upon any individual. I submit plain matters of fact, and men can use them as they will in estimating the skill, the spirit and the success wherewith, at different periods, the diplomacy of the country has been conducted. Our object was to secure a boundary line harmonising with the welfare and defensive safety of our North American provinces. In this we have most fully succeeded. Some of the most eminent military and political authorities in the Empire have declared that America has given up to England every thing the latter had any substantial interest in asking for, and that we, on the other hand, have given up to America no one item, the concession of which could in the slightest degree weaken our position. In the years 1832, '3, '4, and '5, Lord Palmerston would have been happy to ratify the King of Holland's award,—in 1842, *under circumstances less favourable* (for *we*, in the interval, had been surrendering, and the Americans successfully encroaching), we complete a Treaty giving us, even in a territorial point of view, a third more than our friend the King of Holland ever dreamed of awarding to us.

Though Lord Ashburton's Treaty was so extremely advantageous to this country, my conscientious belief is that it will likewise be very beneficial to the United States. War between England and America—between these great and free peoples, standing out before the nations the kindred representatives of British blood, language, religion and sentiment—would be (to venture on an expressive “bull”) —would be, and always must be, “mutually suicidal.” Each blow inflicted one upon the other by these two most powerful nations of the great Teutonic family, would rebound against the hand from which it came. Peace—peace at all hazards—at any price—save the sacrifice of fundamental principle and honour,—peace—heart-cherished peace—friendship in spirit and in act—such is the only wise policy of people who *must*, to a great extent, be always associated in the contemplation of the world—whose connections are so close—and whose interests run concurrent in so many and such extensive chains of circumstances. So strong is my feeling in this respect—so incalculably superior in importance is the maintenance of friendly and honourable peace to the question of a few acres here or there—that any blame which may attach to the late Foreign Minister cannot, in my opinion, be deduced from his readiness to agree to terms so very much worse than those obtained by Lord Ashburton's negotiation. But what can honest men think of the late Foreign Minister's impugnement of that negotiation?

As to the captious individuals who complain of the *tone* of the communications, it is hardly worth while to remind them that it was Lord Ashburton's duty to use such language, according with dignity, courtesy and candour, as was most conducive to the benefit of his

country. His part was to pilot his proceedings, in the most effectual and expeditious mode, to the success of our cause. The clever people who think otherwise I leave to the enjoyment of their peculiar notions.

Be no matter how great the advantages that England has acquired by this settlement, the Americans may rely on it that the benefit to themselves, in the removal of a dispute which constantly menaced them with the danger of a ruinous war—that the advantages they have thus secured are neither few nor slight.

But in America, as everywhere else in the world, there dwell folks who *will not* be pleased. So we find Mr. Benton, a well-known Member of Congress, declaring in the Senate, with respect to the terms of the Treaty—

“That the concessions of Great Britain to the States were small—
“that the territory granted to the United States was of such a nature
“*that it would never be of importance to have held it*—while the pos-
“sessions given up by the United States were important and valuable
“to them, and had the effect of admitting a foreign power within a
“territory which was granted to the United States by the Treaty of
“1783—that if the territory given up by the United States was
“only according to the award of the King of Holland, he (Mr.
“Benton) should not have said a word; but when he saw the Govern-
“ment transcending that award, and giving up more than Great Britain
“had ever demanded, he could not conceal his amazement and morti-
“fication.”

While Mr. Benton is bewailing, the press and people of the British provinces are rejoicing: the Legislatures of New Brunswick and of our other possessions in America are expressing unqualified delight at the Treaty.

Mr. Benton seems to think that because Great Britain has secured territorial and other advantages by the Treaty, his own country must have reason to be dissatisfied with it: he does not adequately estimate the mighty moral benefits (beyond all consideration of a little superabundant land)—the moral, physical and social benefits that will accrue to America, as well as to England, from the removal of one great incentive to enmity and war. Mr. Benton's dissatisfaction, founded on his opinion that England has got terms too advantageous, can, at any rate, be no particular cause of vexation to *us*.

Amongst other fruits of this wise and beneficent negotiation, we find America agreeing to take active steps of cooperation with Great Britain for the suppression of the iniquitous Slave Piracy on the coast of Western Africa:—an American squadron is in future to be employed for the capture of Slavers sailing under the American flag. Here is a remarkable step towards the principle of Freedom—let us hope that, the ice broken, it will be followed by others. The Right of our cruisers to Visit suspected slave-ships bearing American colours has not yet been conceded by the republic, but it is practically exercised by us;—the rest in good time. For the first time, too, America has publicly acknowledged that slaves, the “property” of American citizens, are, from the moment they arrive at any British

settlement or possession—at any place within the sovereign jurisdiction of Great Britain—that by that single circumstance, and at that instant, they become freed from their bondage, and on no ground of pretension to property in human beings can they be reclaimed by their former owners from the British dominions.

Another consequence of the Treaty has been the passing of a law in America, which henceforth for ever will render impossible the recurrence of such absurd and vexatious proceedings as those connected with the detention of M'Leod. Our high-tempered friend Mr. Benton, in an indignant rhapsody about the further concession to England implied by this law, protests that it will “plunge America into disgrace.” Mr. Benton mistakes: his excess of zealotry misleads him. The Treaty and all its effects are certainly honourable and beneficial to England, and glorious to those through whose good policy they have been accomplished; but because auspicious and advantageous to England, are they necessarily, on that account, disgraceful and injurious to America?—Quite a *non-sequitur*.

It is right to add in this place, that communications have been set on foot which give every hope of a pleasant settlement of all matters relating to the Oregon Territory.

I have gone on to some length about the Treaty of Washington.—The subject was one of extraordinary importance in itself, and has given rise to much conversation in either hemisphere. It was an undertaking originated amidst difficulties and intricacies, which, year after year, had been piling up and preparing for the negotiator, and had latterly exhibited a very hopeless aspect. In the face of these thickening difficulties the Treaty was ratified and concluded, to the lasting honour and weal of England, and the glory of all concerned in it.

The *project* of the mission—the selection of the missionary—are amongst the adumbrations of the *mens divinator* that mark and set apart, in momentous crises, the statesman—the National Man—from the vulgar official routinist. The acceptance of the mission, and the mode in which its objects were carried through, take their place amongst the rare and luminous pages in political history, where we see deliberate self-devotion to the common welfare rewarded with triumphant success in every phase of its ennobling aspirations.

Take other passages of our Foreign Policy for the last two years,—we shall find successful results achieved against billowing mountains of obstacles and embarrassments. Cast our eyes on China and Afghanistan—at the horrible disasters bursting down upon our troops in Caubul in 1841—at the tedious and seemingly endless war, or rather slaughter, carried on against the Chinese. In both these remote regions prudent and energetic councils have closed our difficulties with signal triumphs. In France we see the War Fanaticism breaking down before the aspect of a British Government which, without empty bombast, pursues its high course of politic justice with placid, tranquil, but unswerving and immoveable resolution.

In our relations with Russia the present Ministers, by an unusual effort of tact and skill, have succeeded in averting a measure, all-but consummated on their accession to power, and which would have pro-

duced consequences very calamitous to many of our industrious trading and sea-going people. They have completed a negotiation of the utmost value and importance to mercantile men in England.—Following up its stubborn system of restriction, the Cabinet of St. Petersburg had intimated an intention to levy a differential duty on British vessels conveying to Russian ports any goods not the produce of some part of the British dominions. A vast amount of British tonnage—a large number of English ships and sailors—had found profitable employment in carrying to Russia the produce of various foreign countries;—the threatened duty would have destroyed this valuable trade, and inflicted extensive injury on our merchants, sailors and shipwrights (the depressed condition of the body last specified making them peculiarly unable to bear any violent blow). The danger was a formidable one—when the Earl of Aberdeen came into office he found it staring us in the face. I do not stop to speculate on what Lord Palmerston *might have done*, nor as to where, under the late *regime*, our carrying trade to Russia would be by this time, but content myself with stating what *has been done* by Lord Aberdeen. After an arduous negotiation, the “im-pregnable resolution” of the great Northern Colossus has been abandoned, the blow averted, and British shipping secured in its command of the trade.

And by what sacrifice has our point been gained? *We made no sacrifice whatever for it.* England gives up nothing. The condition she makes is, that Russian vessels, arriving in Great Britain from Prussian ports, with articles the produce of Russian Poland, shall be entitled to the same privileges as if they arrive direct from Russian ports! Now, even merging the consideration of the advantageous terms we have ourselves obtained, this is nothing more than an act of simple justice to Russia, inasmuch as Russian Poland, an inland country, has scarcely any available means of communication with the sea, except through the Prussian territory. When the large amount of British shipping engaged in the Russian carrying trade is taken into view, we may form something like an estimate of the good fortune that has attended our negotiations in this matter.

PROSPECTS AND RETROSPECTS.

IN many remaining features of the Foreign and Domestic Policy of the present Government, whereon I have not elaborated in this sketch, I find the same pervading spirit of wholesome, and pains-taking, and successful consultation for the univereal interests of the great British community. I mark them entering office at a time when the terrible distress of the people at home, and the general disorganization of our affairs abroad, might have appalled the boldest man who, on the condition of public responsibility, should have been invoked to the arduous duty of devising our redemption from the pressure of unprecedented embarrassments. Taking office under such circumstances, we hear them replying to the early taunts of their enemies—to the rancorous prophecies of failure and disgrace—to the astounding

descriptions of the dangers and difficulties they must from every side expect to meet,—to all this we hear them replying, not with selfish vain-glory, nor yet with faint-hearted, degrading despondence :—we hear them saying that their united efforts should be applied to bring about improvement, to replace evil by good, to do all that men might do for the restitution of their just position to our country and her noble population.

To this exalted work we see them devote themselves with an abnegation of all personal considerations—an independent repudiation of any popularity founded on erroneous or disingenuous constructions of their views—a manly and temperate energy of purpose, which it would be difficult to parallel. We see them working, at all hours and seasons, with an earnest assiduity to which Downing-street had been long a stranger.

And auspicious and consolatory are the fruits of their labours. In the space of less than two years they have reconsolidated the bases of peace and amity which were tottering throughout the earth. They crouched not before foreign hostility, but bore it down with the majestic spectacle of British might, British justice and resolution. We were to have anarchy—we were to have civil discord. So ran the prophets—the prophets of evil have had their predictions falsified. The law has been found adequate to its perfect though merciful self-vindication. The seed has been sown for general improvement. We are not yet thriving, but our people, from descending, are beginning to rise. There be hope and promise in the times. *The change is no longer from bad to worse, but, to the measure of its extent, from worse to better.—And this from a predicament which was denounced as desperate.*

With practical truths like these before me, I cannot avoid the conclusion that if not thwarted by baneful agitation, by puerile panic, and the tactics of factious opposition, the ultimate recovery of our country's prosperity may be rationally anticipated, under Councils which have already solved the great political problem—which have accomplished the grand decisive result—of halting in the eddying career of ruin, and moving up, against the downward current of adverse circumstances, a step towards the retrieval of our fortunes. I do therefore feel that the social and physical happiness of the landed class, of the mercantile class, of the working people, and of every great component section of our mighty, multiform community, is most profoundly concerned in the maintenance of the present Ministers ;—and for these reasons, as a Christian and honest man, I feel imperatively called on to give them my thankful support.

Let the calm sense of the people of this land say how far their duty and interest suggest strenuous perseverance in a similar course.

